Two Westerners—and What They Mean to You

By WILLIAM ATHERTON DU PUY

I SAT in a high apartment building in Washington at night and looked out over that city from which a nation is governed, meditating on what lay beneath me until I got to talking to myself and this is what I said:

Of all pictures created of paper and ink, which is most familiar to the individuals who go to make up that homogeneous people 117 million strong all speaking the same language and calling themselves Americans?

I paused for an answer until I felt that some psychic end man must have responded: "Well, Mr. Bones, what picture is most familiar?" and I replied:

The picture of a dome emerging from the trees of a gently rising hill—in fact, the dome of yonder Capitol Building where the light at its tip indicates that Congress is meeting in night session on the people's business.

That building has come to be almost synonymous with Old Glory, to stand for that world figure which is the young giant among nations and at the same time the grandfather of free institutions impersonating the government of the United States.

The Capitol yonder, I thought, is the fountain source of government. From beneath it bubbles the double spring of beneficent laws, flowing from the House and Senate and watering all the world that lies beneath the flag.

Who, I wonder, are the individuals sitting at the headwaters there and regulating the flow of that stream? Who today are the most powerful men on Capitol Hill at Washington?

To get the answer to that question I made a week-long canvass and this was the result—Smoot, of Utah, and Mondell, of Wyoming: Smoot in the Senate and Mondell in the House.

Remembering the days of Aldrich and Payne, of Crane and Cannon, I concluded that the center of influence was moving west. Checking over the biographies of the two I found that, contrary to the general run of these self-prepared sketches, neither was a lawyer, neither had taught school, neither made any claim to having been a farmer. I would go to see these two men and ask each how he got where he is.

Senator Reed Smoot, I knew, is an apostle in the Mormon church of Utah. He has been in the Senate for eighteen years and is elected for another six-year term. He has reached the age of 59, is six feet two and weighs 190 pounds. Physically he is a remarkable specimen of manhood, big-boned, vigorous, carrying no undue flesh. Since the day of his birth, he says, he has never known an illness. He is blue-eyed, well thatched with stubby hair, has a close-cropped mustache, is old American stock.

Smoot is chairman of the joint committee of Congress which has in hand the reorganization of the government departments. This means that he is the efficiency expert who will, within the year, rearrange and regroup all those bureaus through which the government functions.

He is chairman of the joint committee on printing which says what may and what may not be published by government agencies. Some of the departments are likely to say that he is an autocratic and unsympathetic czar, that he is not a competent judge of the matter that a scientific bureau should print.

He is chairman of the Senate Committee on public lands, of the committee on expenditures in the Interior Department. He is second man on the all powerful committee on appropriations and pensions. He ranks third on the committee on finance, fourth on civil service, sixth on territories.

I asked Senator Smoot how he gained such power in the Upper House. He said he did it by working. He stated that there was just one thing to which he credited every success he had made in life—work. He protested himself a plain man with a commonplace mind.

I asked this man how many hours a day he worked. He said that he stuck at it 16 hours every day but sometimes he worked 18. He never stops for golf or baseball. He believes that the theory that one should set aside certain time for recreation is all piffle. He has never played and never taken a vacation. To all appearances he is the fittest man of 59 in the Senate. He recommends seven hours sleep in twenty-four as recreation. He snaps off consciousness with the light, sleeps until he is normally refreshed, gets up and goes to work again.

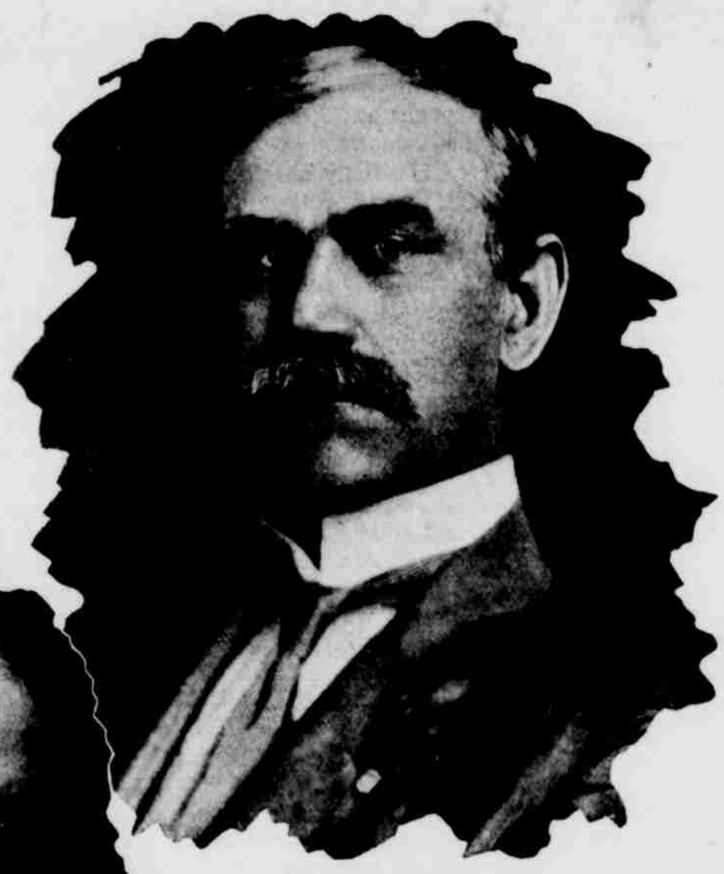
When Senator Smoot first came to Congress he was put on the committee on claims. It was the dullest, dryest assignment to be had. There were thousands of persons praying for relief by the government from some loss, real or imagined. Each claim was fortified by endless settings forth of facts, arguments, hearings. No other man ever dug through these claims as did the young Senator from Utah. He worked on them sixteen hours a day.

So it came to pass that, when a case came up, Smoot would be asked the gist of it. He would set forth the facts, baldly, prosaically, but correctly. It has not often happened in 18 years that anybody has disproved Smoot's facts.

The older Senators began to notice that this man was very useful. He was a great digester of intellectual food that was unpalatable to the majority. Finally the time came when the tariff was to be revised. The Aldrich tariff commission, something more than a decade ago, made one of the most exhaustive studies of that complicated subject ever undertaken. Smoot was made a member of that commission. He ground those 16 hours a day for years on tariff. He came to be a walking encyclopedia of tariff schedules. He could reel them off, past, present and proposed, without end. He was instinctively a high protectionist. Though his father was a Kentucky Democrat he had chosen for himself the Republican fold. His views agreed with those of the men who dominated the Senate. He proved very useful. His knowledge was a matter of great satisfaction to his associates. They did not need to look up the facts. They asked Smoot.

Gradually Smoot has been gathering to himself more and more power. It comes because he is willing to shoulder the work. Few Senators work hard enough to master the detail of the government machine. Smoot does. He is a horse for work. He accepts any job put on him, works until he gets on top of it, adds that much power to himself.

So, today, he is sometimes called the general manager of the United States. It is undoubtedly true that he has more to do with the actual operation of the government than any other man on Capitol Hill. I asked Senator Smoot where he got this idea of happiness through work. He said that his mother taught it to him. She had come to Utah with the early migration of the Mormons. The settlers came on foot. His mother was a girl of eighteen. She walked and pushed a handcart from the Missouri River to Utah. There she took vigorous part in carving an empire out of the plains.



(C) Harris & Ewing

Above—SENATOR REED SMOOT, of Utah.

Left—REP. FRANK MONDELL, of Wyoming.

She believed in work, taught it to her boy. When he was in grammar school he worked Saturdays and holidays in a woolen mill near by. He worked awhile on one machine and awhile on another. He found it a lot of fun to master one machine after another. Boys love machinery. He believes that he had as good a time as the boys who played ball and went fishing. When he was 22 he became manager of this same mill and ran it for many years. In the interim he had completed college before he was eighteen, had managed a general store for four years, had become the proprietor of a drug store which he still owns. Long ago he became a man of independent means.

* * *

Now the story of Frank Mondell is quite another sort of yarn. The Republicans have conferred upon Mr. Mondell their floor leadership on the House side, and that position, in the changed conditions that resulted from the overthrow of the Speaker a decade ago, and his consequent loss of power, is the most commanding at this end of the Capitol. When the appointment of committees was taken away from the Speaker he lost control of those committees. The authority went from the chair to the floor. In caucus each party chooses itself a steering committee and a floor leader who is chairman of that committee. This committee maps out the program and the leader drives it through. It is the top job. When the Republicans came into power two years ago, and the minority leadership became the majority leadership, Mondell, of Wyoming, suave, genial, diplomatic, eased his way into the place of power.

I asked Mr. Mondell how he got where he was, and he said that he did it by following his nose on a long and tortuous journey that wound up just here and by entering with genial enthusiasm into every task that presented itself along the way.

Even that gave no evidence of dramatic situations scattered through an eventful career. I don't believe anybody had ever taken the trouble to dig up the "story" that lay in this Congressional leader. Nobody in Congress, for instance, seemed to know that this blue-eyed, middle-sized, hawk-nosed, friendly floor leader still carries around with him the leaden bullet of a gunman of the West who sought to murder him. The story unwound itself in true movie fashion with Mr. Mondell, the mayor of Newcastle, Wyoming, attempting to rid that community of the stick-up men who infested it.

The town was full of saloons and gambling houses. When the hard times came with the silver slump in the nineties, those satellites of the dives found the pickings so poor that they were driven to robbery. There was a crime wave. The town administration surveyed the situation and decided that it would be well if a score or so of individuals with no visible means of support should move on. A list was made up and the men notified. They should be on their way not later than the midnight train on Friday.

Mr. Mondell came down the principal street that night. He was met by one of the men who had received notice.

"Does that order stand, Mr. Mayor," asked the man. "Do we have to go?"

"Yes," said Mondell. "Don't miss that midnight train."

Thereupon the undesirable whipped out his pistol and began shooting. One bullet entered the body of the mayor and ranged downward. It never came out. Another clipped his hat brim. Being unarmed, he dodged into a doorway.

There was a rough ten years back of Mr. Mondell's coming to Newcastle—ten years as a foreman of a construction gang in railroad building. He became a sort of top sergeant in that construction corps which, forty years ago, worked so busily at the task of laying into one wilderness after another those strips of steel which performed the miracle of its transformation. And all the time Foreman Mondell took pot luck and did man's work, little dreaming of the gang he would boss in 1921. They were running a line up into the Black Hill country in what is now South Dakota, when a difficulty intervened. It seemed that the railroad might be run no further because it was getting too far from a supply of coal that was of the quality required in engines. But for this difficulty it might reach out into Wyoming and Montana.

Frank Mondell's employer had noted that he had books on geology and was often reading them. So he said: "You ought to know more about how to find coal than any of the rest of us. Hitch up a four-mule team, take all the supplies you want, go over into Wyoming and don't come back until you have found it."

It took the gang boss a year and a half to complete his mission. At the end of that time he had what he wanted. He also had oil. His plans were made for getting these out of the ground and these plans contemplated the planting of a town. This town was Newcastle, Wyoming. Frank Mondell was its first citizen. He has been its first citizen ever since.

Fifty-four years ago an itinerant preacher stopped in a tiny town in eastern Iowa which was at that time just settling up. He read his Greek and Hebrew from the original and his box of books was bigger than his box of food. Yet he had added to himself a wife and family for he took the parable of the ravens quite literally. The preacher's attention was drawn to a boy of six, Frank Mondell, who then seemed to be unattached.

Inquiry developed the fact that the boy belonged to nobody in particular. He lived part of the time with a family on one side of the town and part of the time with another family on the other side. His journeyings were occasioned by this scheme of living around. No, he was not related to any of these people. He was only six years old. His name was Frank Mondell. The preacher, still trusting in the ravens, adopted Frank. Thus it happened that Frank Mondell found a foster father and journeyed to the lake country in northwest Iowa, where he lived for eleven years of his boyhood. There was no mystery as to the origin of Frank Mondell. His father, a French Huguenot, who spelled his name "Mondelle," had come to the Upper Mississippi from New England about 1840. He had kept a frontier hotel at Prairie du Chien, in Wisconsin, had later drifted down to St. Louis, where Frank was born. He fought as a captain in the Civil War and came home to find that cholera had taken off his wife and eldest daughter. He married again and brought his new wife to mother his brood of eight children. Almost immediately he died. The stepmother took Frank to relatives in the Iowa village, where she soon afterward died. From that time on Frank Mondell was compelled to shift for himself.